

Pre- & Post-visit Materials for Teachers

Images and Additional Information

Glenn Ligon: AMERICA
March 10-June 5, 2011



Glenn Ligon, *Hands*, 1996.
Silkscreen and gesso on unstretched canvas, 82 x 144 in. (208.3 x 365.8 cm).
Collection of Eileen Harris Norton, Santa Monica

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Education
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Images and Additional Information

We have included some selected images from the exhibition, along with relevant information that you may want to use before or after your museum visit. You can print out these images or project them in your classroom.



Glenn Ligon, *We're Black and Strong*, 1996. Silkscreen and gesso on unstretched canvas, 120 x 84 in. (304.8 x 213.36 cm). San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Accessions Committee Fund: gift of Frances and John Bowes, Emily L. Carroll and Thomas W. Weisel, Collectors Forum, Susan and Robert Green, Danielle and Brooks Walker Jr., and Phyllis Wattis

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Throughout his career, Ligon has largely resisted the use of imagery in his paintings and avoided explicitly tackling current events. One notable exception, however, is his body of work related to the Million Man March, organized in 1995 by Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam in Washington, DC. Touted as an opportunity for black men to proclaim their solidarity while calling for social justice, the march proved controversial because women were explicitly discouraged from participating and some observers found Farrakhan's rhetoric both homophobic and anti-Semitic.

Ligon chose not to attend the event. Like many, he experienced it through the media. He made this work by enlarging a photograph and printing it on unstretched canvas to evoke the banners the marchers carried. He removed the text from the banner, which had read "We're Black and We're Strong." Like his stenciled text paintings, the process of making the work distorted the information Ligon presented.

Imagine making a Xerox 100 times. Eventually, it gets darker and more indistinct, and that's what happened to these images of the march. They became more mysterious, and in some ways, by becoming more mysterious, they became more accurate, more able to portray the feelings that I had about the march.

—Glenn Ligon

Ligon used multiple screens and overprinted them repeatedly, so that the images fell apart and thickened into a haze that evokes the sense of myth shrouding the event. The large scale of these strangely silent protest pictures draws us into the scene, while their blurry surfaces keep us distant from the feeling of community that the rally was meant to affirm. A suite of related works on paper pairs images of the march with the writing of James Baldwin or Farrakhan's fiery words, texts that dissolve into obscurity beneath a mist of shimmering coal dust.

The Million Man March was controversial from its inception. Who was included and who was excluded? What image of masculinity did it put forward? And in the end, was it effective? Ligon doesn't try to answer these questions, but the series serves as a complex meditation on them.

Images and Additional Information



RAN AWAY, Glenn, a black male, 5'8", very short hair cut, nearly completely shaved, stocky build, 155-165 lbs., medium complexion (not "light skinned," not "dark skinned," slightly orange). Wearing faded blue jeans, short sleeve button-down 50's style shirt, nice glasses (small, oval shaped), no socks. Very articulate, seemingly well-educated, does not look at you straight in the eye when talking to you. He's socially very adept, yet, paradoxically, he's somewhat of a loner.

12/45

Glenn Ligon '93

Glenn Ligon, *Runaways*, 1993. Suite of ten lithographs, 16 x 12 in. (40.6 x 30.5 cm) each. Whitney Museum of American Art; Gift of the Peter Norton Family Foundation 94.29.1-10

Images and Additional Information



Ran away, Glenn,
a black man - early 30's, very short
cropped hair, small oval wire-rimmed
glasses. Wearing large black linen shirt
with white buttons, dark navy shorts,
black socks and shoes. Black-and-white
bead bracelet and silver watch on left
wrist. No other jewelry. He has a sweet
voice, is quiet. Appears somewhat timid.

12/45

Glenn Ligon '93

Glenn Ligon, *Runaways*, 1993. Suite of ten lithographs, 16 x 12 in. (40.6 x 30.5 cm) each. Whitney Museum of American Art; Gift of the Peter Norton Family Foundation 94.29.1-10

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Ran away, Glenn Ligon. He's a shortish broad-shouldered black man, pretty dark-skinned, with glasses. Kind of stocky, tends to look down and turn in when he walks. Real short hair, almost none. Clothes non-descript, something button-down and plaid, maybe, and shorts and sandals. Wide lower face and narrow upper face. Nice teeth.

12/45

Glenn Ligon '93

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RAN AWAY, Glenn, a young black man twenty-eight years old, about five feet six inches high. Dressed in blue jeans, a blue button-down shirt, black shoes. Medium build. Very short haircut (not quite shaved head). Large neck. Green tinted sunglasses.

12/45

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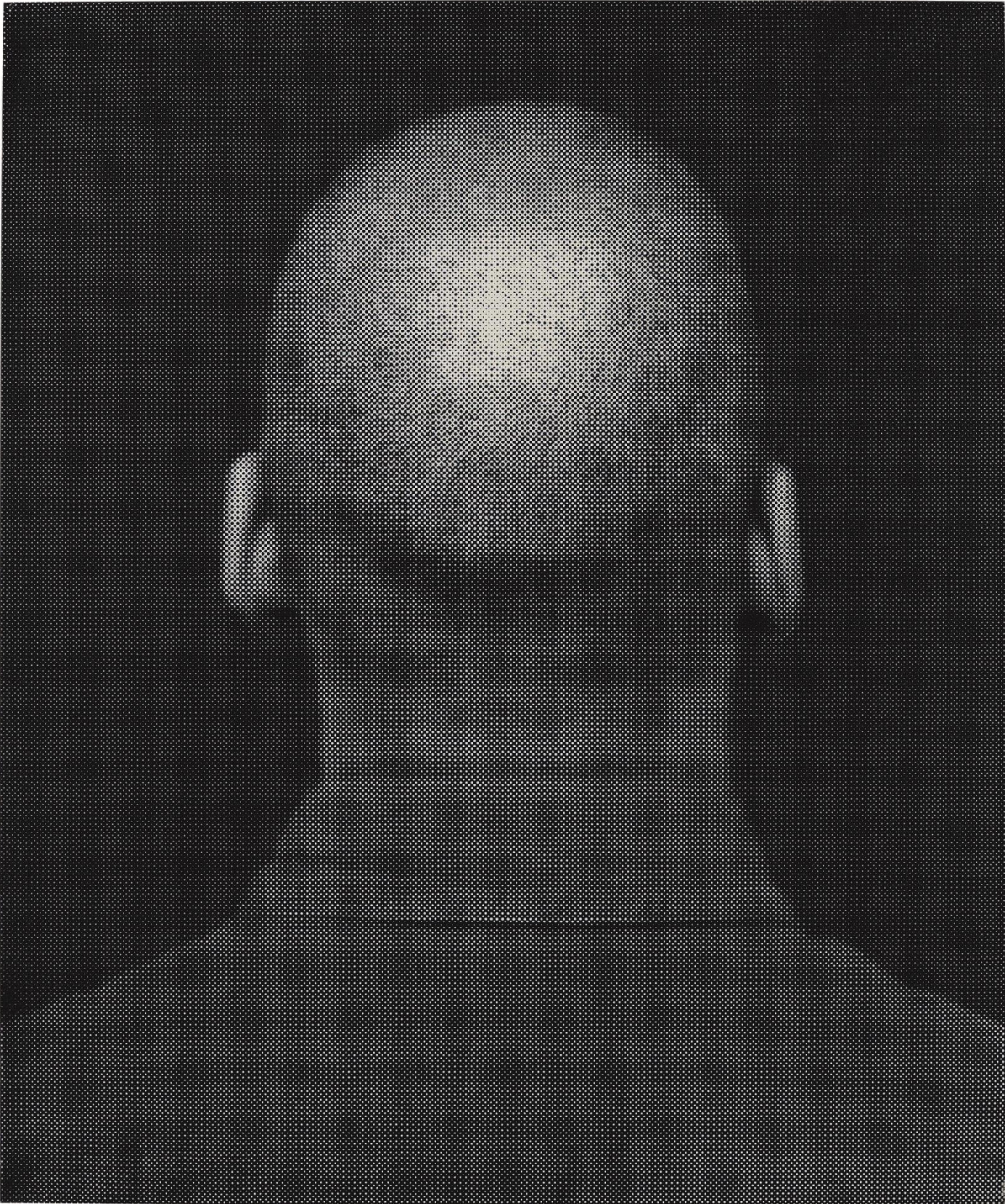
Glenn Ligon, *Runaways*, 1993.

Suite of ten lithographs, 16 x 12 in. (40.6 x 30.5 cm) each.

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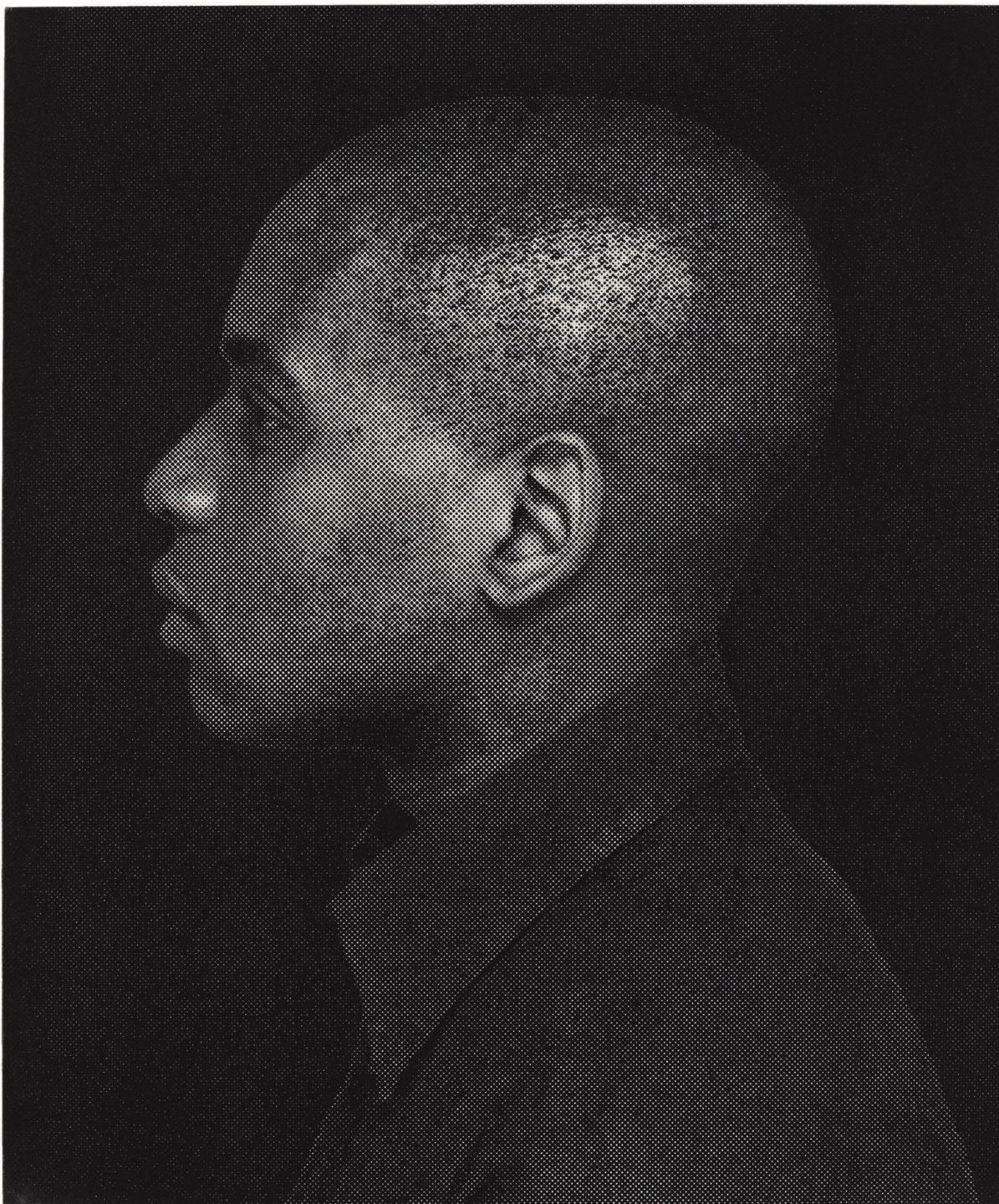
This series of lithographs, *Runaways*, began with Ligon's study of nineteenth century advertisements for runaway slaves, written by slave owners. Ligon asked ten friends to describe him as if they were filing a "missing persons" report. He presented their descriptions in prints seeking a runaway named Glenn. Like the slave owners, Ligon's friends paint a picture that is both generic—he is five feet eight inches tall—and oddly idiosyncratic. When Glenn walks, for example, "his feet cross each other a little bit." The works are funny and disturbing. With a light touch, Ligon confronts the issue of slavery and brings it into our own time. He suggests that it remains a powerful undercurrent in American society.

Images and Additional Information



Glenn Ligon, *Self-Portrait*, 1996. Silkscreen and gesso on canvas, 48 x 40 in. (121.9 x 101.6 cm).
Collection of the artist

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In these self-portraits, Ligon refuses to look directly out at us. The images, silk-screened onto canvas with thick enamel ink, are dark and grainy. Curator Scott Rothkopf: “He’s both inhabiting the mug shot but then sort of undoing it by turning his head away from us and showing us only the back. It wouldn’t be very useful in a police lineup or a criminal suspect picture. And I think that that tension, and that kind of resistance, is a real part of the work and its political interest. And, you know, this is part of systems for law enforcement in this country, which black men are certainly more obviously made the target of than any other population. And I think Glenn is, in a way, responding to and resisting that.”

Images and Additional Information



Glenn Ligon, *Self-Portrait at Seven Years Old*, 2005. Ink and graphite on paper, 12 1/16 x 12 1/16 in. (30.6 x 30.6 cm). Collection of the artist

Images and Additional Information



Glenn Ligon, *Self-Portrait at Eleven Years Old*, 2004. Stenciled linen pulp painting on cotton based sheet, 35 x 30 in. (88.9 x 76.2 cm). Edition no. 1/20. Printed and published by Dieu Donn , Papermill, New York. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Purchase with funds from the Print Committee 2005.11

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Glenn Ligon's *Self-Portrait at Eleven Years Old* is actually an image of Stevie Wonder from the cover of the singer's 1977 greatest-hits album. It is one of a series of works in which Ligon used pictures of musicians such as Michael Jackson and James Brown whom he admired as a child, to represent himself when he was younger. To make this portrait, Ligon first drew it on a sheet of handmade paper, which was then digitally scanned and printed on Mylar. Sections of the image were then carefully cut out, and pieces of pulp paper were put into the openings with an eyedropper, creating the dots. The artist explained that to him, the image is like "the teenage bedroom or the collages of the obsessed fan."

The information in these pre- and post-visit materials is adapted from:
Glenn Ligon: America exhibition wall texts and Antenna Audio tour press script.
Scott Rothkopf, *Glenn Ligon AMERICA*, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, distributed by Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2011.
Glenn Ligon, Scott Rothkopf, Editor, *Yourself in the World*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press in Association with Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2011